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ABSTRACT

A study investigated how the beliefs of literacy scholars affect the development of basal reading programs, the roles literacy scholars play in the development of new reading programs, and some of the critical factors that affect the disposition of innovative ideas. Two literacy scholars who had actively collaborated on the development of separate basal reading programs were selected. Analysis of documents created in and around the development of two basal reading programs was augmented with retrospective interviews. Results indicated that: (1) the innovative ideas which the authors intended to contribute to their programs had clear connections to their research careers; (2) each author was an active participant in the process; (3) publishers considered innovative ideas advocated by authors in relation to the overall program; (4) the authors' intentions of introducing innovative approaches to literacy instruction and assessment resulted in different outcomes; and (5) the authors seldom exercised absolute control over the decision-making processes. Results also indicated that both basal reading programs were assembled with attention to "the market"; literacy research was used to advance innovative ideas; and the authors' contributions of innovative ideas were subject to historical influences. Findings suggest that the decision-making processes out of which the basal reading programs emerged can be viewed as compromises negotiated among the following tensions: between innovation and tradition, between contemporary realities and future possibilities, between audiences (teachers versus students), between competing assumptions about the foundations of proficiency (skills-based versus holism), between competing models of literacy learning, and between conceptions of teaching (art versus science.) (Contains 63 references.) (RS)

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Factors Affecting the Disposition of Research-Based Innovations in the Development of a Basal Reading Program: A Case Analysis

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Factors Affecting the Disposition of Research —Based Innovations in the Development of a Basal Reading Program: A Case Analysis

In an ideal world, a basal reading program might be thought of an artifact which stands at the juncture of research and practice. To what extent this is the case in the real word is open to question. In the foreword to *Learning to Read in America's Schools,* Anderson (1984) lamented the fact that despite an increase in literacy research, this work appeared to be having minimal impact on the content and the format of elementary school literacy. Anderson challenged researchers to "give a high priority to" interacting with publishers, teachers, teacher-trainers, and school administrators in an effort to translate literacy theory into practice.

In fact, a list of authors of contemporary basal reading programs already contains the names of literacy scholars whose considerable professional stature can be measured in terms of publications, as well as leadership roles in their institutions and professional organizations. This study was an attempt to look at the role such literacy scholars might play in moving literacy theory into print and the factors which affect their ability to do so.

Innovations in literacy instruction occur in three arenas: philosophical/teheoretical orientation (e.g., Smith, 1982; Chall, 1983; Pearson, 1985; Carbo; 1987; Adams; 1990), instructional methodoogy (e.g., Brophy, 1979; Hunter, 1986; Slavin, 1990; Edelsky, 1991) and the core literature (e.g., Giddings, 1992; McGee, 1992). These topics are clearly the basis for rich discussions among scholars and among classroom teachers. What remains unclear is the process through which innovative ideas from these categories find their way into the latest editions of basal reading programs.

At the outset, it is important to note that popular conceptions of authorship do not apply to the peculiar relationship between basal author and educational publisher. This case study was an attempt to reconstruct the process of authorship vis a vis basal the development of a basal reading program and to provide information about the unique roles literacy scholars play as authors of basal reading programs. Specifically, this study asked three questions:

* How do the beliefs of literacy scholars affect the development of basal reading programs?;

* What roles do literacy scholars play in the development of new reading programs?; and

* What are some of the critical factors that affect the disposition of innovative ideas?

Procedures

Following a pilot study, criteria were developed to guide the selection of case study participants. Two key informants were selected. These were literacy scholars who had actively collaborated on the development of separate basal reading programs.

Because the aim was to capture the process which guides the construction of reading programs, this study relied mainly upon analyses of documents created in and around the development of two basal reading programs. Document analyses was augmented through retrospective interviews in which authors who participated in the development of these programs reflected on their experiences.

Data were analyzed and coded to describe authors' key beliefs. Data were re-coded to identify the roles authors played during their collaborations with publishers. Additional analyses compared authors' intentions with published outcomes. Finally, data were used to develop an illustrative analytical narrative which reconstructed the experiences of one author.

Inferences were drawn to explain how authors contributed to the development of the reading programs at thematic (macro-organizational) levels as well as at levels of specific goals and formats (micro-organizational). These analyses and inferences were subsequently reviewed by key informants. Their comments were addressed and incorporated in the final data analysis.

Findings

The major findings of this study add to the understanding of the way literacy scholars advocate and negotiate innovative ideas through the process of developing a basal reading program. These findings can be summarized as follows:

1. The innovative ideas which the authors intended to contribute to their programs had clear connections to their research careers. Authors

appeared to have attempted to use the basal reading program as a delivery vehicle for their own beliefs about literacy instruction and assessment.

2. Each author was an active participant in the process. Both authors assumed a variety of roles before, during, and after the publication of the reading programs. Through these roles, authors originated ideas or responded to the ideas of others and exploited opportunities to refocus issues, to shift them so as to align with their intentions and perspectives.
3. Publishers considered innovative ideas advocated by authors in relation to the overall program. An author's proposed innovation was analyzed for its connection with the program's general philosophical orientation. and evaluated (by publishers) on the basis of their compatibility or fit with other components of the reading program. For example, Author #1's intention of supporting poor readers while maintaining a unified curriculum was not well-connected to the publishing company's tradition of providing for individual differences through different curricula. By comparison, Author #2's intention to use the theme of "prior experience" as the program's organizing strategy was closely-linked to the company's tradition. This theme was interpreted as an evolution of the company's traditional strong, skills approach to comprehension instruction.
4. The authors' intentions of introducing innovative approaches literacy instruction and assessment resulted in different outcomes. Innovative ideas were accepted in total, accepted in part, adapted, or rejected in total. For example, the theme of "prior experience" as reflected by its prominence in the Teacher Edition, Student Edition, and practice book dominated the reading program. The theme was also incorporated as the central part of the lesson format used to provide instruction in comprehension strategies and vocabulary development. Innovative intentions such as an alternative assessment plan were accepted only in part. In this case, the plan was accepted as an optional strategy. As with reader response activities, these contributions were not interpreted as central to the design of the program. Author #1's intention to develop a single curriculum was adapted by the publishing company. In this case, all students did read from a common core of literature selections, but

students received different instruction through the utilization of specialized teacher manuals.

5. The authors seldom exercised absolute control over the decision-making processes. More typically, authors and other members of the publishing team engaged in a process of prolonged negotiations. Authors appeared to have less decision-making authority than did editors and publishing executives. Authors appeared to have more control over the process during the conceptualization phase: introducing new ideas, training staff members, writing position papers and proposals. The expertise of literacy scholars was valued: they led groups which developed prototypical models, they analyzed competitors' products, they wrote and presented statements about the program's philosophy, etc.). However, authors did not have the final say in decisions. As program ideas were consolidated, authors' shifted to a "reviewer" role. In this case, the author's expertise -- developing effective programs for students who were experiencing difficulty learning to read -- dominated the negotiation of the development of an acceptable prototype. However, when the program became more focused, "differentiating instruction" was redefined to mean meeting the needs of primarily Spanish-language students -- the author was ultimately unable to redirect the publisher's approach. Also, authors in this study believed there were decision-making processes at work which did not include them.

Because the authors in this inquiry did not maintain control of the development of innovative ideas during this process, it seems reasonable to ask "Who was in control?" At a basic level, the obvious answer points to the publisher (executives and their representative employees - senior and project level editors) as the final decision-makers. Inevitably, the publisher sets the budget. However, this perception is simplistic. This inquiry suggests that the publishers themselves were guided by outside factors and considerations. A more profitable question, it seems to me, is to ask "What are the factors which influence the decision-making processes of the publishers described in this study, particularly with respect to the innovative ideas advanced by the case study authors?"

The findings which emerged from the analyses pointed to three themes which appeared to influence the extent and the direction the authors' contributions affected

the process of developing their respective basal reading programs. These themes were "the market" (or economic influences), "literacy research" (or scholarly influences), and "tradition" (or historical influences).

Economic Influences

Both basal reading programs in this study were assembled with attention to "the market." Notions of "the market" were reflected in the outcomes of innovative ideas the case authors advocated. These innovations were aimed to impact on the overall instructional and assessment framework.

Market factors were evident in decisions about where the effects of these innovations should take place (in teacher editions, in student anthology, or in ancillary materials such as kits, cards, and charts.)

Among economic factors in this study was the targeting of specific regional markets. One author's innovation was evaluated in light of the perception of the target markets.

Another economic factor pertained to notions of the consumer. The basal reading programs described in this study were developed according to particular sets of beliefs about the teachers who utilize these materials. These sets of beliefs included appraisals of teachers' general level of expertise, teachers' interest in literacy instruction, as well as the realities and logistics of classroom teaching.

An additional economic factor relates to issues of cost/effectiveness. In this study, innovations were accommodated through an alternation strategy characterized by a hierarchy of least-risk options. When publishing executives in this study perceived an innovative idea as fulfilling a significant market demand, their response was swift and strong. The incorporation of schema theory as an organizing theme, for example, was viewed as a low-risk response to an innovation which had a large and growing base among classroom teachers. In contrast, innovative ideas such as reader response or open-ended assessment, which were perceived as enjoying marginal familiarity among classroom teachers, were incorporated marginally (mainly as labels) or as optional alternatives.

Literacy Influences

Literacy research was used to advance innovative ideas in several ways. Scholarship contributed to the conceptualization phase, as authors proposed

innovative ideas through position papers, meetings, and memoranda, they were supported by research-based rationales. These rationales were either grounded in the author's own research or were citations of research from other literacy scholars.

Literacy scholarship also influenced the development phase. Authors functioned as "staff developers" providing professional books, articles, and research reports to management, editors, and sales representatives. Authors lobbied to have their innovative ideas applied to instructional formats or assessment designs.

In this study, scholarship generally appeared to count for far more as a reactive factor and tended to come into play during tasks such as product reviews and competitive analyses. Case study authors believed they were called upon to evaluate aspects of the program according to the products' relationship with contemporary research views. However, instances which put scholarly research in conflict with the market research, negotiations were controlled by the publishers' notions of "the market."

Both authors believed publishers responded slowly to most scholarly influences, and commented on the "long view" of collaboration. That is, research-based ideas were believed to be powerful influences stimulating demand among the general education market. Two examples --the impact of schema theory and holistic assessment -- illustrate a changing response to persistent issues. Such changes took place over a period of nearly ten years.

Historical Influences

The authors' contributions of innovative ideas were subject to historical influences. Two general types of historical influences were observed -- corporate and classroom.

Corporate traditions were seen to have had a powerful effect on the way the authors' ideas were received. Corporate traditions refer to the previous programs the publisher has produced. Over time, publishers believed their products had established corporate images characterized through successive editions of reading programs. Innovations were viewed from the perspective of these corporate traditions and evaluated according to their alignment with these traditions.

The influence of corporate traditions was also reflected in the author teams which publishers assembled. In this study, both basal reading programs involved key participants --authors and editors -- who had worked together on previous reading

programs. Authors framed their intentions in terms of their prior experiences. Authors were reminded to retain "old friends", that is, familiar instructional formats, skill labels, and program components that had appeared in previous editions. These conventional features were believed to be of importance to prospective consumers, whose expectations helped define the boundaries of innovation.

Classroom traditions also acted as powerful influences in determining the outcomes of particular innovative ideas. Because basal reading programs described in this study follow rather than lead classroom trends, innovation appeared constrained by the prevailing and historically grounded perceptions of classroom practice. Whether such perceptions were based on actual data or speculation, the notion that entrenched traditions (e.g., ability grouping) affected the disposition of proposed innovations.

Basal reading programs have their own historic traditions as cultural artifacts. Programs have traditional components, and each component has traditional formats and functions. Innovations in student workbooks or assessment packages, for example, were considered in terms of their relationship to their more traditional counterparts. The merits of a new assessment programs were weighed against existing assessment packages. Innovations perceived as evolutionary links were more likely to become incorporated than those which were perceived as revolutionary challenges to tradition.

Discussion

An important theme in this study is the perception of literacy and the perception of literacy instruction. Insofar as literacy instructional materials reflect what the authors and publishers estimate a significant number of teachers, students, and others will "buy" as valuable instruction, the basal reading programs underscore contemporary values about reading instruction and assessment.

While the beliefs of authors, editors, and publishers may have been grounded on nothing more substantial than perception, personal experience, or intuition. Participants were seen to have been operating from inconsistent positions. That is, analysis of the data pointed to important tensions among these beliefs. In this way, the basal reading programs discussed here and the decision-making processes out of which they emerged can be viewed as compromises negotiated among the following critical tensions.

* Basal reading programs negotiate between innovation and tradition -- dynamic versus static perspectives. Market pressures require publishers to provide their sales representatives new products to sell. These products need to appear innovative even to casual, superficial examination. At the same time, the publishers and authors expressed concern to maintain ties with tradition. The result maximizes strategic labeling and minimizes actual innovation.

*Basal reading programs negotiate between contemporary realities and future possibilities -- leading versus following. On the one hand, instructional materials were developed to support beliefs about teachers' perceptions of literacy and instructional practice. At the same time, authors attempted to model approaches which would cause teachers to modify those perceptions and practices. The result is a stance which is simultaneously patronizing and challenging.

* Basal reading programs negotiate between audiences --teachers versus students. On the one hand, basal reading programs aim to help students develop literacy. On the other hand, the basal reading programs aim to help teachers develop a pedagogy of literacy. The results were materials which assumed literacy development was natural but required instructional expertise.

*Basal reading programs negotiate between competing assumptions about the foundations of proficiency --skills-based versus holism. Authors expressed the belief that skillful reading is accomplished through the holistic, integrated employment of a range of cue systems, sub-routines, and effective self-monitoring. Unfortunately, basal reading programs do not account for the way skillful readers invoke, blend, and utilize these strategies into holistic procedures. The result is an instructional format which presents skills as a linear progression of discrete features but suggests that the reading process is holistic and interactive.

*Basal reading programs negotiate between competing models of literacy learning -- as a result of direct instruction versus indirect acquisition. Basal programs can be seen as attempts to be simultaneously explicit and allusive in the language used to direct teachers and students. Activities which were

expected to be direct instruction were well-defined and prescriptive. Other activities, such as response activities which were believed to be extension activities were written with minimal direction, and may only allude to ways teachers might customize the activity.

*Basal reading programs negotiate between competing conceptions of teaching -- art versus science. As the progeny of educational science, they are highly-prescriptive and formulaic guidebooks to literacy. Yet, like works of art, they enable teachers to re-examine the way they think about literacy. The result is an attempt to be both didactic and impressionistic.

These tensions are not surprising. They reflect the ambiguities and contradictions that comprise our current state of understanding, in terms of literacy acquisition and instruction. Given the complex context described in this study, how reasonable is the challenge that literacy scholars form collaborative partnerships with publishers (and other interested parties) for the purposes of bringing literacy research into practice? In light of the experiences of the authors who participated in this investigation, the strategy appears to be questionable, at least in terms of efforts and effects.

It might be more realistic, perhaps, for literacy scholars to simply re-emphasize their areas of expertise, namely conducting and reporting literacy research. In this way, scholarship has an indirect influence on classroom practice. Employing scholars to prepare or advise in the preparation of instructional materials, in contrast, can be seen as an attempt to short-cut this approach.

Literacy scholars intending to translate research into classroom practice through the medium of basal reading programs might expect minimal success. Ultimately, it may be that contributions to instructional practice must derive from direct partnerships with classroom teachers as co-researchers and co-developers of instructional materials.

Resolution of these issues are not likely to come about through the employment of more skillful authors or more enlightened publishers. So long as there continues to be a fundamental assumption that the collaboration involved in the development of basal reading programs occurs in the context of powerful economic, scholarly, and historic influences, we ought to expect basal reading materials to resist important innovation

and proceed much the same as they are.

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